

EMANATIONS IN TENEMENTS AND SCHOOLS, 1869

LOOK at the tenement-houses. See a large family crowded into one or two rooms—in winter, the windows nailed down and every cranny stopped up; the same air breathed over and over again by eight or ten persons; the red-hot stove consuming oxygen still faster, and sending out, through its very substance, the fearfully poisonous carbonic oxide, and perhaps also sulphuretted hydrogen; add the steam and smoke from the cooking; the exhalations from the unwashed bodies of so many persons; the gases from the sink or water-closet, trapped imperfectly or not at all; and very likely those from the children's evacuations kept in the room—and you have a picture, not overdrawn, of the dwellings of thousands in our city. If it be summer, the windows are thrown open only to admit the fever-breeding emanations from overflowing privies and cesspools, and heaps of decaying garbage in the yard. What wonder that these people die in great numbers; and that, even where there is no specific affection engendered by such terrible surroundings, they are so enfeebled as to fall an easy prey to disease when it appears? When scarlet fever or typhoid fever comes among them they have no strength to withstand it, and no fair chance for recovery. Even if convalescence does drag its slow length along, it is so very slow that some other disease will, most likely, overtake and stop it short. I regard pure air, then, as of more vital importance than food. In this country a man in health can get a living well enough; but if his vital powers are exhausted by breathing impure air he cannot eat, he cannot work. Bad air and poverty go together.

Our school-houses, too, which we are all so proud of, look at them. I have not a word to say against our excellent system of public education; but I do think our school-houses a discredit to our civilization. In these rooms—over-crowded, over-heated, the atmosphere deoxidized and tainted with the exhalations of hundreds of bodies—the children sit with hot skins, hot heads, and perhaps cold feet, from the bad system of warming, and their delicate nervous systems tortured by the fear of punishment; and here they are kept from nine o'clock till two. It is enough to crush the life out of them; and they do die, or become so weakened that they can never regain

robust health. From these hot rooms they go out into the cold air, their relaxed skins not braced to meet it, and pneumonia or some other disease speedily carries them off. These facts we have represented to the Board of Education. The new school-houses are, many of them, good; but the old ones have been so surrounded with buildings that there is no way for fresh air to reach them.

John O. Stone: The influence of emanations
upon the health of cities. *Bull. N.Y. Acad.
Med.* 3: 398-99, 1866-1869.